

# Part I: A Tale of Two Journeys

## Bay in the Balance

An in-depth report on the future of Duxbury Bay



*This is the first of a 10-part series on the status of Duxbury Bay. It was researched and written by Debora Katz and will focus on the history and future of Duxbury's greatest natural treasure. In part one, Katz writes of two journeys: one that she took around the bay this summer and another, an imaginary trip, that Myles Standish might have taken 370 years ago.*

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

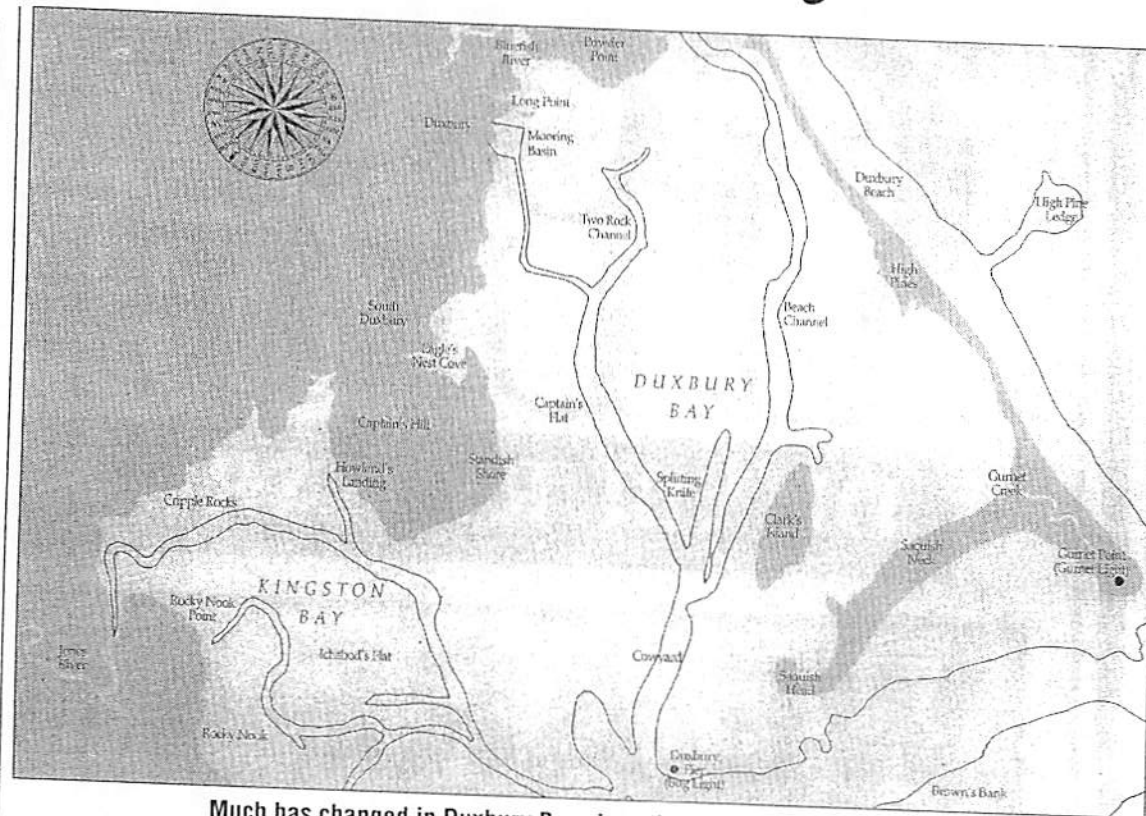
## Navigating the Waters of 1632

**D**UXBURY, 1632 – It is early morning on a summer day in Duxbury, and you are Myles Standish, the great, Plymouth Colony army captain. You rise from your feather bed at dawn, red hair askew, to greet your wife, Barbara, and your four sons. In the keeping room you share breakfast. You eat quickly as your old friend Hobomok, a survivor of the dying Wampanoag tribe, waits at a sandy spot on the southeast side of Standish Shore for a day of seafowl hunting. He is, as usual, stoically patient.

Hobomok has built a sturdy

distance you catch a glimpse of your younger sons picking berries. As they so often do, the children eat almost as much as they pick.

You paddle southward and pause to look back where you can see the thatched roof of your sturdy, long house on the bluff overlooking the bay. It is the only structure in sight; your



Much has changed in Duxbury Bay since the days of Myles Standish.

Courtesy of the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society

You begin to relax, and enjoy the salty air of a June morning. The bay's clean clear water and the beauty of the thick forests that fill the peninsula always amaze you as you paddle by. You are a long way from the gritty sounds and sights you left when the Mayflower set sail from Plymouth, England, years ago. Above, a large flock of black ducks passes as you reach Morton's Hole. They interrupt the shifting sounds of the

Saquish, appropriately named by the natives; it means "place of many clams." They came here often, using foot-long oyster shells to dig for clams and oysters.

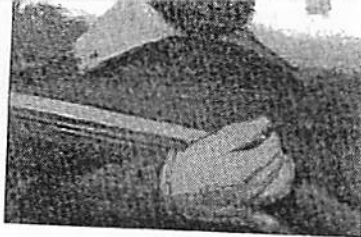
The waters are calm this morning, protected by the long stretch of towering sand dunes. You pass a stand of woodland named after the gurnet fish that existed in great numbers off a headland in the English Channel. At Gurnet Creek, colonists

the growing Alden Family. Alden, you think, is a lucky man.

The canoe now makes its way around a wooded peninsula. Here, among the vast marshes, the sky teems with seafowl. You find a grassy slope shaded by tall pines and beach the dugout. Then, you prepare your fowling piece. You aim toward the mass of ducks above and light the flint. A loud boom echoes

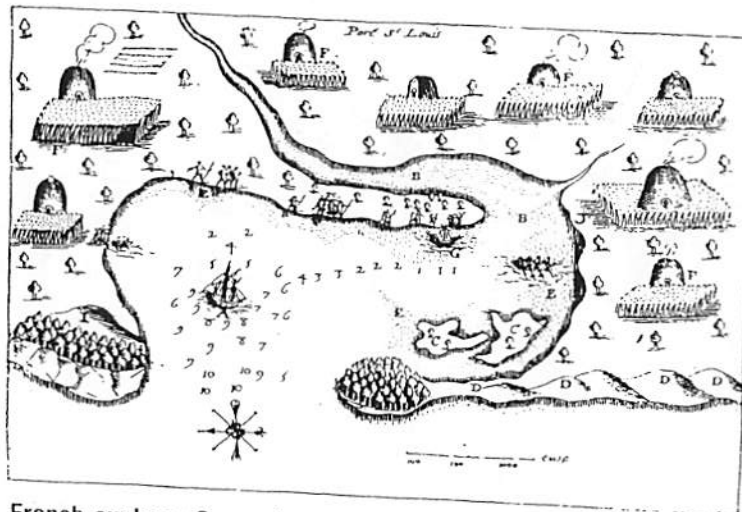
dugout canoe and is preparing for the trip. Before heading toward the popular marshes to the east you scan the terrain of the bay, eyes searching for potential conflict. It is the soldier in you that will not rest, not even on this pastoral morning, and it underscores the respect you have earned from the colonists as a military leader.

Satisfied that all is quiet, you shove off toward the mouth of the Jones River. A deer herd moves into a wooded area above the shoreline, and in the



**Captain Standish**

neighbor, Francis Eaton's homestead is north of your 100 acres and beyond that lie the 80 acres of William Brewster near Eagle's Nest Creek. His new Duxbury home is still in the planning stage.



French explorer Samuel de Champlain drew this map of Duxbury Bay in 1605.

*Courtesy of the Standish Shore Improvement Association*

ing sounds of dipping paddles. In the bow, Hobomok quietly lobbies for a chance to fish and weighs in on the best method for spearing bluefish.

You now pass Morton's Hole, a popular gardening spot of the native Patuxet, and eventually reach the confluence where the Jones River meets the bay. The river, which flows north, was named after the kindly Captain of the Mayflower, who, rather than return home in early 1621, kept his ship at anchor to help the colonists get through that first brutal winter.

The current is moving faster now, and the canoe glides toward the open sea. You turn left as the bay opens and, looking across, spot an island barely visible through the thousands of gulls and terns swarming its rocky shore. It is Clark's Island, named after John Clarke, the Mayflower mate, who was the first to step on its shores during a Pilgrim exploration 12 years earlier.

As you come closer, the island's forest of red cedars reflects in the bay's gentle waters. To the right are the sands of

often catch large quantities of striped bass.

The canoe moves quickly now from the power of Hobomok's arms, and you spot a clump of pine trees, roughly two-thirds the distance from the Gurnet to the marshes where you plan to hunt. It is called High Pines.

If not for the huge sand dunes, you could see the open ocean on the other side where seals and nesting turtles are bathing. Looking up you notice thousands of delicate birds, their species unknown to you. Each summer they appear, frantically feeding on the mud flats and resting on shore during high tide. Then, as the weather turns cold, they disappear only to return again at the same time next year.

Before reaching the hunting site, you give in to Hobomok's wish to try out his new staff at a favorite fishing spot near the Blue Fish River. In the distance you see John Alden, the cooper, tending his fields on a rise of land on the south side of the river. His wife, Priscilla, whom he married five years earlier, is at home minding the brood of

out the bay, and several waterfowl fall from the sky. Hobomok gathers them into a canvas bag. You will pluck them once you return to the homestead.

The bay continues to empty as you paddle home. When you finally reach Standish Shore, having made a circle of the bay, you and Hobomok strain to drag the canoe over mud flats. You remember Barbara's request for shellfish and, using a garden hoe, dig into the mud; minutes later you are satisfied with your haul of quahogs. The sack fills quickly.

It was another successful day of hunting and fishing on the bay that you found so fit for shipping when you first laid eyes on it years earlier. It is a most hopeful place, you recall thinking. It is a good place to call home. ▲

## CREDITS

The Bay in the Balance series is edited by David Cutler. Special thanks to David Grossman for providing much of the photography for this series. For more of his work please visit [www.gurnetroad.com](http://www.gurnetroad.com)

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### PART IV

**The Shorebirds:  
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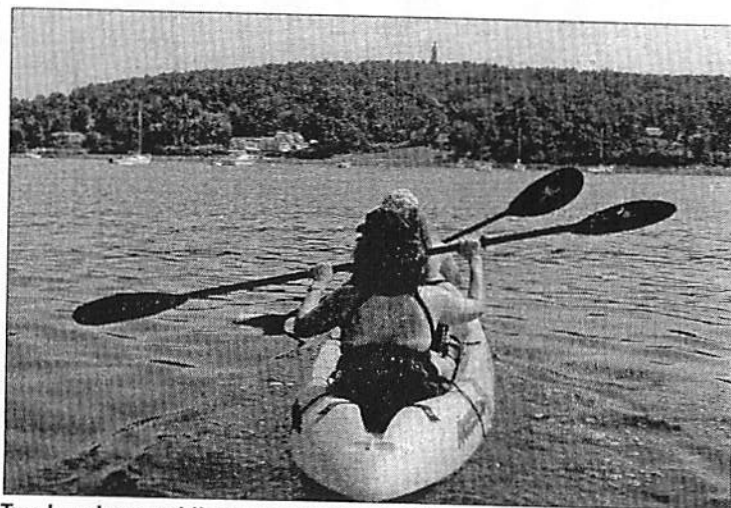
**Pollution Patrol:  
Love that  
Dirty Water**

## Navigating the Waters of 2002

**D**UXBURY, 2002 — Awakening on a muggy summer morning, you roll out of your Sealy Posturepedic to the smell of French Vanilla coffee from your automatic coffee maker. The kids have left for sailing class at the maritime school, and you find a note from your husband: he's at Bayside Marine, checking on your boat's motor which left you stranded last weekend off Saquish.

You gulp down your coffee and head out to meet a friend at Howland's Landing. There is no parking left on the road leading to the landing, so you pull in behind a long line of cars on Captain's Hill. You see your friend preparing her bright yellow kayak for your day trip around the bay and, as you wait, a trailer negotiates the steep road to pick up a Sea Ray returning from Clark's Island.

Once aboard you paddle off in the direction of Landing Beach and make your way



Two kayakers paddle toward Captain's Hill as Myles Standish looms in the distance.

*Photo by David Grossman*

geese were hunted in great numbers from such blinds.

At Landing Beach, local families enjoy the waters of the bay. Kids jump off a floating dock as you glide by, making your way toward the mouth of the Jones River. You see an old shipyard in the distance, and, as you turn to paddle toward Bug Light, some friends in their Grady White spot you. They

uttering sounds that don't quite jibe with the joys of a morning sail.

Looking east, you see the crowded houses of the Gurnet, and down the beach is a lonely clump of trees called High Pines. It is there, the harbor master reports, that a family of displaced coyotes has taken up residence. As your friend's children take turns on the tube, whirling through the waters near Clark's Island, you notice there are no birds in sight. The island was once home to terns, gulls, and the largest population of egrets north of the Delaware Bay. Now it is quiet with only a few

days.

Suddenly a flock of shore-birds takes flight in unison, scared by the arrival of two SUVs on the bayside's shore. The birds have traveled here all the way from the Canadian Arctic. Duxbury Bay is their lay-over for food and rest until beginning their marathon non-stop flight to South America.

For the wind surfers the day is perfect. There is a large group off Powder Point and the fast colorful sails attract a photographer in a small motor boat. Along the railing of the bridge are the omnipresent fishermen awaiting a hit from a blue or a striper or a summer fluke. Success is fleeting.

The tubing done, you decide to call it a day. As you leave and round a marshy bend, students from the yacht club and the maritime school are enjoying their sailing lessons. An instructor yells out encouragement from a small outboard as she encircles them. You spot your daughters, deep in concentration, learning how to raise and lower their sails.

Although the day is perfect for boating, there are still many boats moored in the harbor as it pushes into the bay. Boats are everywhere, more than you can

## Bay by the Numbers



7

Distance in miles of Duxbury Beach including Saquish.

14,062

Bushels of scallops taken from Duxbury waters in 1953 (valued at \$66,407). Today only a handful exist.

18,618

Acres of Duxbury waters available for shellfishing. 78 acres are conditionally approved; 796 acres are prohibited near Kingston Bay.

47,000

Cubic yards of sand and stones



## Clark's Island lies in the background as the shores of Saquish teem with bathers and boaters.

Photo by David Grossman

through moored boats, turning back to see well-manicured lawns and stately homes along Captain's Hill. The roar of two jet skiers chasing each other in Kingston Bay interrupts your thoughts. In the distance is the persistent hum of lawnmowers at work.

Then you notice something you've never seen before — four round yellow buoys floating in a large squared area away from the moorings. Your friend tells you they are markers for an oyster aquaculture grant owned by a Duxbury family. It's a growing industry, in town and elsewhere, she tells you.

You head towards Morton's Hole where an immense contemporary estate sits on a rise overlooking the bay. A new boat is docked on a pier that covers a stretch of marsh. There you see a doe with her fawn eating berries on the shore. As you make the bend, an old gunning stand appears, and you push your mind back to the early 1900s when ducks and

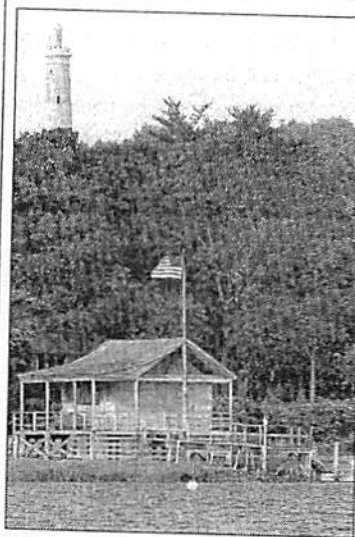
slow down and ask you to join them. They'll tie the kayak to their boat, they say, and head out to Saquish Beach. Tired from paddling, you accept the offer.

As you arrive at Saquish, you spot more than 20 boats anchored near shore. After your skipper jostles for space, you decide to drop the kayak at a friend's cottage and motor toward Clark's Island for some tubing. Forty feet ahead, a sailboat equipped with an obviously failing motor drifts too quickly toward the anchor line of a large cabin cruiser. The sailboat's rudder and motor become entangled on the anchor line. It's a mess.

The distraught wife of the sailboat's captain (whom you happen to know and who swore she would never own a boat) is kicking frantically to keep their boat from crashing into the cabin cruiser. You are frustrated that you can't help. Bravely they wave you away,

houses visible. The cedar forests are also gone. Even so, it is still a place of beauty.

The Grady White turns toward the Powder Point Bridge with the long stretch of beach on your right. A small square pen of mesh wiring stands in a sandy area. It is a makeshift home for plovers, a federally threatened species. In the distance, you see two plover patrollers slowing down vehicles headed to the Gurnet. Four plover eggs rest within the secured pen. The challenge to protect them will come in earnest when the plovers hatch in about 28



Where eagles once nested, piers are a more common site.

Photo by David Grossman

ever remember, even in the much sought after deep-water moorings.

Heading for Standish Shore, you reach Eagles Nest, a place that is normally serene. But on this day two outboards filled with teenagers nearly collide as they chase each other. On the banks are beautiful homes, one after the next, each with its own pier jetting into the small inlet that once served as a haven for eagles.

You cruise past Standish Shore then move inland toward Howland's Landing. As you pass Cedar Hill, you spot a commercial fisherman with a motorized dingy arriving for an afternoon of shellfishing. It has been a good year for shellfish, with the harbor master designating bonus shellfish months.

Seeing the fisherman reminds your friend that she needs to call a local fish market to have six lobsters prepared for tonight's guests. You lend her your cell phone, and recall an early morning jog when you met a Duxbury lobsterman at the pier preparing to go out on his lobster boat. "The Nancy L." How he made you laugh with his stories!

As your friend drops you on

displaced after the Blizzard of 1978.

# 400,000

Cubic yards of sand and stones displaced after the 1991 "Perfect Storm".

# 7,000

Miles flown by shorebirds heading to South America who "pit stop" in Duxbury Beach.

shore and you help haul out a day's worth of recreational gear—coolers, boogie boards, towels, and a bag of spilt sun tan lotion — you think about the great day you've had on the bay. An osprey's sudden squalling causes you to look up. The bird is gone, but there, towering over the treetops, you spot the splendid granite monument of Myles Standish. A permanent reminder of the great captain who once walked these shores and protected these precious waters. You think, "How far we have come." ▲

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Shellfishing

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Fish Tales:  
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### PART IX

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